DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 367 644 SP 035 087

AUTHOR Ring, Tracey R.
TITLE Self-Confidence and Critical Thinking Skills: Changes during the Student Teaching Experience.
PUB DATE Nov 93
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, November 10-12, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attitude Change; *Critical Thinking; Elementary Education; Higher Education; Preservice Teacher Education; Reading Instruction; *Self Esteem; Self Evaluation (Individuals); *Student Teachers; *Student Teaching; Surveys; *Teaching Experience; Thinking Skills
IDENTIFIERS Preservice Teachers

ABSTRACT

The study discussed in this paper examined changes which occurred during the student teaching experience of elementary education majors regarding their ability to teach selected critical thinking skills. Data were obtained from student teachers (N=45) immediately before and after their student teaching experience. Self-confidence was measured by scoring the Mississippi State University Survey of Confidence in Teaching Reading (SCTR) piloted exclusively for this investigation. The SCTR contained five clusters of reading skills typically taught by classroom teachers in elementary schools. A critical thinking skills cluster contained 13 items on which students were asked to rate their perceived confidence or ability to actually conduct selected assessment activities with children in classrooms. Findings indicated that following the student teaching experience subjects exhibited significantly more confidence in their ability to conduct reading activities that involved critical thinking skills. Consistent with the literature, this study concludes that a powerful impact derives from the student teaching experience. A summary of T-Test Comparisons between pre- and poststudent teachers on critical thinking skills is provided in tabular form. (LL)

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SELF-CONFIDENCE AND CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS: CHANGES DURING THE STUDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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Tracey R. Ring, Middle Tennessee State University

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The purpose of this study was to determine the changes which occurred during the student teaching experience of elementary education majors regarding their confidence to perform selected critical thinking skills. Measures were obtained from 45 preservice teachers immediately before and after their student teaching experience.

Self-confidence was measured by scores from Mississippi State University Survey of Confidence in Teaching Reading (SCTR) which was piloted exclusively for this investigation. The SCTR contained five clusters of reading skills typically taught by classroom teachers in elementary schools. Those clusters included: specific approaches to teaching reading, organizational skills, general reading skills, critical thinking skills, and evaluation skills. The critical thinking skills cluster contained 13 items on which students were asked to rate their perceived confidence or ability to actually conduct selected assessment activities with children in classrooms. The specific focus of the study was the degree of change which might or might not take place during student teaching with respect to these critical thinking skills. Currently there is a strong emphasis on higher order thinking skills at the university level as well as the elementary school level. In other words, the process in which students arrive with a particular answer is as important if not more so than arriving with the correct answer. Comparisons were made using both analysis of variance and t-tests for dependent groups.

The following results were obtained in the study:

1. Of the 13 items in the critical thinking skills cluster, both groups of student teachers rated recognizing bias and recognizing assumptions in written material as their least confident task to perform in the schools. Using a Likert type five-

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point rating scale, prestudent teachers had an overall mean of 3.68 for recognizing bias and 3.65 for recognizing assumptions. Poststudent teachers had an overall mean of 4.02 for recognizing bias and 4.00 for recognizing assumptions (see Table 1).

2. Prestudent teachers expressed the most confidence in their ability to summarize information. Poststudent teachers expressed the highest level of confidence in their ability to organize events in sequence.

3. Analysis of the scores in all five cluster skills revealed the critical thinking skills cluster to be the highest rated by prestudent teachers and rated as the second highest by the poststudent teachers. That is, subjects in the study exhibited more confidence in their ability to conduct reading activities involving critical thinking skills than other kinds of activities. For example, the students felt significantly more confident in their abilities to execute a variety of critical thinking skills than to execute basic approaches in teaching reading or evaluation skills.

4. An interesting finding in the study was the change which occurred during the student teaching period with respect to the individual items as opposed to the cluster scores. Using t-tests for dependent groups to compare the same student teachers both before and after student teaching, 10 of the 13 items were found to be statistically significant. That is, in 10 separate areas the students significantly shifted their confidence levels during their student teaching experience. This serves as obvious support that the student teaching experience has a powerful impact on students in a variety of ways; the results of this study suggest that confidence to carry out critical thinking skill activities is one of those ways.

In recent years, teacher self-confidence has received increased emphasis in the research literature (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Several studies have confirmed that strong positive correlations exist between teacher self-confidence and subsequent student achievement. Bandura (1982) has postulated that a teacher's perception of their ability to

perform selected classroom activities can actually modify subsequent classroom behaviors. Since Goodlad (1983) has urged teacher education institutions to evaluate themselves on a variety of indicators, it seems plausible that one of those indicators would be the extent to which programs allow students to gain a sense of self-confidence in their abilities to handle classroom realities such as critical thinking skills.

Table 1

Summary of T-Test Comparisons Between Pre- and Poststudent Teachers on Critical Thinking Skills

Cluster	x	SD	t- value	df	p
Classify					
Prestudent	3.97	.73			
Poststudent	4.32	.67	2.81	43	.007*
Creative Solutions					
Prestudent	4.00	.70			
Poststudent	4.31	.66	2.46	44	.05*
Fact and Opinion					
Prestudent	4.26	.61			
Poststudent	4.64	.52	3.04	44	.004*
Fact and Fantasy					
Prestudent	4.27	.66			
Poststudent	4.60	.54	2.64	42	.05*
Draw Conclusions					
Prestudent	4.22	.67			
Poststudent	4.54	.54	2.98	43	.005*
Form Judgements					
Prestudent	4.04	.63			
Poststudent	4.35	.74	2.73	44	.009*
Interpret Charts					
Prestudent	4.06	.79			
Poststudent	4.41	.79	2.72	42	.05*
Inferences					
Prestudent	4.00	.77			
Poststudent	4.34	.71	2.41	43	.02*
Organize Events					
Prestudent	4.41	.66			
Poststudent	4.72	.45	2.67	42	.05*

Table continues

Predict					
Prestudent	4.34	.72			
Poststudent	4.65	.52	2.67	42	.05*
Recognize Bias					
Prestudent	3.68	.93			
Poststudent	4.02	.97	1.98	43	.054
Recognize Assumptions					
Prestudent	3.65	.85			
Poststudent	4.00	1.16	1.66	40	.104
Summarize					
Prestudent	4.42	.77			
Poststudent	4.27	1.02	.25	43	.806

*$p < .05$

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